



Including All Students

Introduction

The Individuals with Disabilities education Act (IDEA) is the public law that requires schools to provide a “free appropriate public education” for each child with a disability. This means each eligible student has the right to a public education in the least restrictive environment. Specifically, the legislation states:

Each public agency shall ensure

- 1. That to the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities, including children in public and private institutions or other care facilities, are educated with children who are non-disabled; and*
- 2. That special classes, separate schooling or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular educational environment occurs only when the nature or severity of the disability is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily.*

Note: A student's placement in the general education classroom is the first option the Individualized Education Plan team must consider.

Educators, politicians, and people in the disability field often use the term “inclusion” to refer to the process for including students with disabilities in the general education classrooms of the public schools they would normally attend if they did not have a disability. However, there are two variations as noted below.

- *Full inclusion* refers to students with disabilities who receive their entire education within the general education setting (sometimes referred to as mainstreaming).
- *Partial inclusion* refers to the practice of educating students with disabilities in general education classrooms for some portion of their school day, while they spend the other portion of the day receiving instruction in a special education classroom or resource room outside of the mainstream.

Note: Other variations may exist from school district to school district based on their level of commitment and resources to include all students.

Planning and Implementing Processes

An integral part of deciding whether or not the student will be educated within the general education classroom is an individualized inquiry into the possible range of aids and supports that are needed to ensure that the student can be educated satisfactorily in that environment. The IEP team may determine that the student cannot be educated satisfactorily in the general education classroom, even when appropriate aids and supports are provided. An alternative placement must then be considered. A policy that supports and encourages appropriate inclusion is characterized by the following practices and policies:

- A full continuum of placement options and services within each option
- Appropriate professional development
- Adequate time for teachers to plan and collaborate on behalf of all students
- Class sizes responsive to student needs
- Staff and technical assistance appropriate to teacher and student needs

So, what are some components of appropriate inclusion? The following factors have been identified through research and practice as critical to establishing successful inclusionary practices and programs.

1. Establish a philosophy that supports appropriate inclusionary practice. A clear philosophy at the state and district level provides decision makers with a framework to weigh educational choices and alternatives and gives them the authority to commit resources to support the decisions that are made.
2. Plan effectively for inclusion. Include all who will be involved in and affected by whatever inclusion is planned. Teamwork and collaboration at the local school are essential to addressing the many questions and issues associated with the inclusion of each student. Designate a person who will be responsible to lead the team, call meetings, coordinate and oversee IEP development and implementation, schedule staff training, ensure availability of needed resources, and monitor the overall inclusion effort.
3. Involve the top administrator as a change agent. With their support, a model can be established to welcome students with disabilities, to encourage collaborative team efforts among faculty and staff, to set planning time aside for inclusion issues, to make resources available, and to get parents involved.
4. Involve parents. By law, parents are entitled to be fully involved in planning the education of their child with a disability. Remember that parents have in depth knowledge of their child's personality, strengths, and needs and can make substantial contributions to the inclusion effort.
5. Develop the disability awareness of staff and students. Teachers and aides need in depth knowledge to understand and meet the student's needs and to help establish an atmosphere of acceptance among all students in the classroom.

Note: In some cases it may be necessary for students to have information about classroom routines that might change, equipment that might be used by the disabled student, and safety issues. However, district policy regarding confidentiality of a student's personal information should be observed.

6. Provide staff with training. General education teachers must be provided with the training they need in order to meet the special learning and behavioral needs of students. Seminars at local universities, in-service sessions provided by special education teachers, and materials specific to the nature of students' disabilities are some ways to provide training. Networking is also an effective way to provide continuing training and to provide a means for teachers to ask questions and get answers from specialists in the field.
7. Ensure that there is adequate support in the classroom. The IDEA states that when children with disabilities are educated in regular classes, accommodations and supports must be provided as appropriate to each child's special needs. Supplementary aids and services that educators have used successfully include:
 - a. Modifications to the regular class curriculum
 - b. Assistance of a classroom aide or special education teacher

- c. Special education training for the regular teacher
 - d. Use of computer-assisted devices
 - e. Note takers, and
 - f. Use of a resource room
8. Involve the student with the disability in the process.
 9. Target a specific activity. When the goal has been clearly stated, assist the student by considering what might assist them in completing that activity.
 10. Look for people with technical expertise beyond the educational realm. Consider enlisting the help of service organizations (Kiwanis, Lions, Optimists, Rotary Club, etc.) for additional expertise and funding.

Each student with a disability included in the mainstream needs to have an individual planning team that meets on a regularly scheduled basis to discuss any needs or resolve any problems the student or teacher may be having. This team may include many of the same members that are on the IEP team.

One of the challenges of inclusion is adapting the general education curriculum and environment to meet the needs of students with disabilities. By modifying the environment, instruction, tools and materials used for learning, and/or the physical requirements, the student will have the opportunity to perform at least a portion of the required skills.

Evaluating the Student and the Inclusion Program

For students with disabilities, their IEP provides a benchmark against which to measure progress. The question to consider is, "Has the student achieved the goals and objectives listed in the IEP?"

When evaluating inclusion programs at the local level, the following questions should be considered to determine what is working and what is not.

1. Are students with and without disabilities achieving the outcomes projected?
2. Are teachers getting the training they need?
3. Do teachers have adequate opportunity to collaborate with others?
4. How effectively are the planning teams collaborating?
5. How do parents feel about the program?
6. What adjustments need to be made to the program to improve its operation?

Adapted from *Including All Students: A General Educator's Guide to Teaching a Diverse Student Population*, Kansas Curriculum Center, 2000, and from *Planning for Inclusion*, originally published in the NICHY News Digest, Vol. 5, No. 1, July 1995.